Success Story Electricity Sector - Joint Study EPSU/EURELECTRIC/EMCEF: ‘Towards a low carbon electricity industry: employment effects & opportunities for the social partners’

Context

The European energy sector is at a crossroads. Fighting climate change and implementing the EU 2020 strategy (20% renewables, 20% energy efficiency savings and 20% reduction of CO2 emissions demand major change while the industry also sees a technological shift towards so-called smart grids and a more active role of industries, SMEs and households in managing their energy demand. The opening up of the EU electricity sector for competition, a process started with an EU directive in the mid 90’s has resulted in a continuous restructuring process impacting on the companies seeking to compete effecting the very way in which companies work. There have been further directives and regulatory challenges resulting in one of the most heavily EU regulated sectors. This has affected employment, working conditions and work organisation. Restructuring has thus been a major issue for the electricity social dialogue committee resulting in an important toolkit on restructuring for companies and trade unions. The EU has now decided to reduce CO2 emissions further to nearly zero for the European power sector in 2050. This will be a major challenge for companies and the work force.

Hence the big issue is: how to assure a smooth transition towards a low carbon economy. We do not expect a revolution with change from one day to the next, but instead we will witness an “evolution” in terms of new technologies and new skills with more focus on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, ICT skills required, of redeployment of resources [financial, human and technical] and adaptation of working methods, work organisation and processes. Many companies have become European or even global and deal with many and different legislative frameworks, with different customers, sellers, partners and institutions as well as with different systems of industrial relations. We are aware of the challenges this poses for the companies and workers and their unions in the electricity social dialogue committee. Our agreement on CSR is an example of how we try to assist to ensure standards of high level.

It is in this context that the Joint Study EPSU/EURELECTRIC/EMCEF: ‘Towards a low carbon electricity industry: employment effects & opportunities for the social partners’ has been undertaken and published in January 2011. The objective of the study was to highlight these trends and in particular the challenge that comes from addressing climate change. We can engage in this transformation for it to be a “just transition”.

“We have for many years explored the trends that affect our industry. As with restructuring, equality and demographic change we seek to learn from the experience of the social partners in EU countries”, says Sylvain Lefebvre of IndustriAll-Europe, one of the two trade union Federations involved in the electricity social dialogue. He continues: “We define common principles on what we expect from companies dealing with these developments and issue recommendations regarding good practice that can assist the social partners in their dialogue and bargaining policies.”
Emanuela Preiti of EURELECTRIC, the employers' organisation, comments that of course there are differences of opinion in a project of this nature, and we spent time to clarify what we mean by certain terms and what we agree is good practice.” She stresses: “That is why it is important for the European Commission, and in our case the Directorate General of Energy in particular, to take account of our views, since they are based on a shared understanding of the developments and how they affect the industry its workers and society.”

The social partners are pleased to see their concerns on climate change and just transition reflected in the Commission's work on the Energy Roadmaps 2050. Although more could be done regarding the follow up, and continued consultation with the social dialogue committee, a recurring theme argues Jan Willem Goudriaan, of the European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU). But not only with the Commission. “This study led to a new approach in which there is a clearer commitment to consider the result and the recommendations at national level, something we have since formalised in a framework of actions.”

With the study, different issues come together on which the social partners have focused on in recent years and which are expected to dominate their discussions. Climate change and its interaction with the internal market, EU regulations and the aim to reduce emissions to almost zero for Europe's power sector are leading to a new wave of restructuring. The tools developed can assist. The social partners expect to evaluate the outcome of the framework of action in 2016.

Towards a low carbon electricity industry: employment effects and opportunities

http://www.epsu.org/a/7356

Joint Position on the Energy Roadmaps 2050

http://www.epsu.org/a/7501

Restructuring toolkit

http://www.epsu.org/a/4761